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IV. — *On Ancient Superstition.*

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I.

THE Greek word for superstition is *δεισιδαιμονία*, literally, "fear of demons," and, as such, superstition is regarded by those who specially dealt with it during antiquity.¹ While the noun apparently does not occur before Theophrastos, the corresponding adjective *δεισιδαίμων* is found as early as Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*,² although there it applies to the zealous worshipper of the gods, and not to the superstitious man in the more recent sense of the word. But we may safely assume that the word acquired its special meaning at a considerably earlier time, for we see Menander harping on this string in a comedy to which he gave the title *Δεισιδαίμων*.³ In fact, the end of the fifth and the beginning of the fourth centuries seem to have been especially favorable to the development of the idea conveyed by the special use of the word. For, at this period, the Orphic doctrine, which had existed for centuries, seems to have gained a stronger hold on the masses. Through Herodotos⁴ we first hear of the various Orphic rites; the *πολλὰ γράμματα* of the sect attracted Euripides'⁵ attention, and Plato,⁶ in his *Republic*, mentions their *ὄμαδος βίβλων*. Rohde,⁷ I think, has abundantly proved that Orpheus' followers were among the chief promulgators of purifications and charms against evil spirits.

¹ Theophr. *Charact.* 16; Plut. *de Super.* 2; cp. 4.: to the *δεισιδαίμων* the *ἀρχὴ θεῶν* is a tyrannis. See also Babick, *de Deisidaemonia apud Veteres*, diss. Lips.

² Xenoph. *Cyrop.* III. 3, 58.

³ Kock, *F. C. A.* III. 32 ff.

⁴ Herod. II. 81.

⁵ Eurip. *Hippol.* 954.

⁶ Plat. *Rep.* II. 364 E.

⁷ Erwin Rohde, *Psyche*, 398. Theophr. also mentions particularly the *Ὀρφεο-τελεσταί*.

I believe, therefore, that this period of great intellectual struggles and religious changes was well adapted for coining the word *δεισιδαίμων*, by which it stamped the adherents of a faith which just then began to die out and fall an easy prey to derision.¹

The Latin *superstitio* would seem to be a late product; it is not found before Cicero.² But its derivative, *superstitiosus*, appears as early as Plautus.³ Here, indeed, we meet with the same difficulty as in Greek. For in Plautus the word seems to denote a man gifted with prophetic power rather than superstitious. I have elsewhere⁴ derived the word from *superstes* and interpreted it as "survival."⁵ I do not, by any means, consider this etymology as certain, but in lack of something better, I still venture to adhere to it. From this meaning, the different usages of *superstitiosus* as religious, prophetic, and superstitious, may be derived without too great a strain.⁶

It is only natural, however, that in course of time the signification of both words should have undergone changes. In fact, the very perspicuity of the Greek *δεισιδαιμονία* must have affected the word in accordance with the changes which the conception of a demon (*δαίμων*) underwent in later periods.⁷ As for the Romans, the use of *superstitio* for any foreign religion, and especially for the Jewish and Christian faiths,⁸ sufficiently shows the change.

¹ I have no doubt that the manifold influences of the sophists and of Anaxagoras must have affected wider strata of the population. The occurrences during the pestilence (Thukyd. II. 47, 52) and the Hermocopidae distinctly show this altered spirit. Nor is a tenacious clinging to the old beliefs in some circles, like that of Nikias, inconsistent with so radical a change. N. himself was decidedly *δεισιδαίμων* (Plut. *de Sup.* 8).

² Cic. *Nat. Deor.* I. 117 a.o.

³ Plaut. *Amphitruo*, 323; Rudens, 1139; Curculio, 397.

⁴ Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopædie*, I. 29.

⁵ Superstitio — superstes = natio — natus.

⁶ The superstitious man clings to the survivals (religious), even after they fall into contempt (superstitious), and, inasmuch as the divination it refers to is low and ridiculous, it would even acquire the meaning of prophetic.

⁷ Heinze, *Xenocrates*.

⁸ Pliny the younger, *Epist.* X. 97, 9; Tac. *Hist.* V. 13. Plutarch also speaks of the Jewish *δεισιδαιμονία*, referring, it is true, to the strict observation of the Sabbath only: *de Sup.* 8.

But the principal question is : may these definitions influence our investigation ?

It will certainly be necessary to state what has been considered to be superstitious during the different periods of antiquity ; and perhaps such statistics might even show the course of thought which caused this continuous repudiation and reception of beliefs. But our final aim demands a still deeper insight. Why not, therefore, abandon the ancient definitions and start from those now prevailing ? Unfortunately, we are here in a real *embarras de richesse*. To the scientist, every irrational belief not founded on careful observation would be superstition, and thither he would unhesitatingly relegate most of the tales told by the ancient naturalists.¹ On the other hand, from the orthodox standpoint of a revealed religion, the whole religious life of antiquity is superstitious. It is in this sense we find the fathers of the Church terming heathendom a superstition, thus avenging the taunt inflicted upon Christianity by Pliny and his contemporaries.

We must reject both of these views as too sweeping. Modern mythological research, more especially on Teutonic mythology,² has established beyond doubt the value of superstitious customs and practices in preserving an earlier stage of religious feeling, otherwise lost ; and the same has been shown in the case of modern Greek Folk Lore.³ The great number of instances where such an attempt has met with success seems to me to raise this observation to the rank of a law which ought to be applied to antiquity itself. In this light, the inquiry into superstition becomes a branch of the history of religion, equal perhaps to the value of archaeology in what the Germans call "Kunstmythologie."

This task of tracing the development of superstition from its religious origin to its crudest and most senile aspects

¹ This, for instance, is the side taken by Brehm, in his celebrated *Thierleben*.

² J. Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie* ; F. Liebrecht, *Zur Volkskunde* ; Mannhardt, *Feld und Waldkulte* ; Frazer, *The Golden Bough*.

³ Esp. C. Wachsmuth, *Das alte Griechenland im neuen* ; B. Schmidt, *Volksleben der Neugriechen*.

would be easy if we had to deal with one uninterrupted movement. We should only have to follow the ancient traditions according to their age. But this unbroken development does not exist. In the history of literature and art, the impossibility of showing any such continuous flow has been duly recognized in our century. And the recent researches into soul-worship and into an early animal-worship of the Greeks teach us the same lesson in the field of ancient religion.¹ No doubt an Athenian of the fifth century smiled at Hesiod's firm belief in the pollution of the sun by the exposures of human excrements.² Yet his burial-laws prove him to have held the same belief with regard to corpses.³ The follower of the Stoa might not believe in the picture of Hades' wild mother, madly rushing through the air with the souls of the dead, so familiar to Athens that Aeschylus needs but one word to recall her image.⁴ Still, Folk Lore shows this conception so firmly rooted in popular belief that a later period shaped Death itself after this model.⁵ If we think of this unceasing fluctuation, how a religious belief is now being pushed back into oblivion, only to break forth again with redoubled power, we cannot help recognizing the existence of certain laws which regulate these movements as the eternal and unvarying rules of the conception of the supernatural. This shows clearly the insufficiency of the so-called historical method of stating the extent of superstitions at different periods, which method does not take into account that a late superstition may in its growth and origin be even older than a Homeric one.

The question, however, is how far does the nature of our sources enable us to follow this supposed fluctuation? With a few exceptions, the remnants of Greek literature which have come down to us are the works of men who were the very best and most enlightened of their own ages. It is as perilous to adopt their opinions on superstition and religion,

¹ E. Rohde, *Psyche*. A. B. Cook, *Journ. Hell. Stud.* 1894, 81 ff.; cp. Loeschcke, *Athen. Mitt.* XIX. 519, and Noack, *ibid.* 480.

² Hesiod, *Works*, 727.

³ E. Rohde, *Psyche*, 207, i.

⁴ Aesch. *Agam.* 1189.

⁵ B. Schmidt, *Volksleben s. Charos.*

as it would be to accept Kant's and Goethe's views on the religious feeling of the eighteenth century. All the more, because neither in Greece nor in Rome was there any dogmatically established doctrine which could set us our standard in the way Christianity does in dealing with modern superstitions.

II.

It is true, we have two treatises solely devoted to superstitions: Plutarch's *περὶ δεισιδαιμονίας* and Theophrastos' *δεισιδαίμων*. But Plutarch's booklet, being a *προτρεπτικός*, dwells mostly on the baseness and the dangers of being superstitious. There is scarcely one fact in it of which we may make use. Moreover, he deals with the superstitions of a late age, corrupted, as it were, by a long familiarity with foreign sectarian beliefs. Theophrastos' admirable sketch, on the other hand, abounds in facts. Yet, if we carefully consider his information, very little of it is of value for us. For, although his work is based on actual life, taken from the comedy, his standpoint is too exalted, so that among the features of his *δεισιδαίμων* he includes beliefs which no doubt simply belonged to the every-day religion of the people.¹

Our search will extend chiefly to the humbler regions of literature. In the first line, to the writers on natural history, medicine, *παράδοξα*, and *θαυμάσια*. Here the palm is due to Pliny, who, notwithstanding his fervent protestations, has preserved with unmistakable pleasure the "frauds of the magicians" and with them much valuable information. Even more reliable knowledge may be gathered from his incidental mention of miraculous powers ascribed to natural objects or of queer customs which he sets forth to illustrate his doctrines.

¹ As superstitions proper, I can only accept the "angang" of the *weasel* and the *owl*, the spitting at the sight of a maniac or an epileptic, and perhaps the unlucky foreboding of the nibbled grain-bag. The beliefs concerning the snake, the purificatory rites in the morning, and the consultation of the *Ὁρφεοτελεστής* once a month belong to the sphere of popular religion, as well as the fear of uncleanness caused by the touch of tombs and women in confinement. Even these form that proper religious basis underlying superstition which we are trying to find.

His work is, indeed, an inexhaustible storehouse. Moreover, he stands *unus pro multis*, as the excerptor of so many authors lost to us. This, however, renders it difficult to make the proper use of his information, as we must in every case trace back his statements to their sources, at the same time guarding against the numerous misunderstandings to which the very method of his work made him open.¹ Of other authors it may suffice to mention Aelian, Alexander of Tralles, Paulus Aegineta, Marcellus of Bordeaux. As a rule, however, the later an author's period, the less is the value of his information, despite its growing quantity, and the more is it derived from second-hand or third-hand sources. The much scantier facts given by Galen, Theophrastos, Aristotle, and Hippokrates are much more valuable.²

The conservative character of agricultural customs has made them the richest field of superstitions in modern Folk Lore. This rule holds good for antiquity also. The Geoponica delight in narrating such things. Their sad state, however, due partly to our manuscripts, partly to the unconscientiousness of their Byzantine compilers, renders it necessary to deal with this treatise with extreme care. The efforts of Gemoll³ and Oder⁴ seem to have been almost in vain; and confusion here reigns supreme.⁵ The condition of the Roman agricultural writers is slightly better. But Columella and his follower Palladius embodied too much of the young and fabulous traditions of later Alexandrinism. Fortunately we possess Cato, whose work in its simplicity is brimful of important reports on superstitions of his own period.

¹ Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Enc.* I. 29 ff. passim. As to misunderstandings, cp. p. 58, 63 (radish and cabbage).

² F. i. Galen on amulets (f. i. *Simpl. Med.* X. 18); Theophrastos on the κύμνον (*H. P.* VII. 3, 3); Aristotle on the male principle in the egg (π. ζῳον γεν. III. 27); Hippokrates on charms (π. ιερ. νόσ. VI. 354 Littré).

³ *Berl. Stud.* 1883.

⁴ *Rhein. Mus.* XLV. 58 ff.; XLVIII. 1 ff.

⁵ No doubt Oder was right in spurning Gemoll's confidence in the lemmata, though his own deductions and conclusions do not seem much safer. But even if he should be right, our present purpose will not be much furthered. For these sources are for the most part themselves of a fabulous nature and of a comparatively late age.

Third, come the magical papyri.¹ Though as products of a secret science they do not properly belong here, still they contain much popular lore. As yet this has been much neglected, while the greatest care has been bestowed on the theological parts of their contents. This neglect is partly due to the difficulty of severing the property of Greece from the thick cobwebs of Oriental superstition in which it is entangled, and which necessitate the constant help of the Egyptologist and Semitist. The chief fault in what has already been done is the endeavor to attribute too much to real Greek antiquity.²

Another source, rich in superstitious traditions, is formed by the authors of the patristic literature, more especially by such men as Origenes,³ Clemens of Alexandria⁴ and Hippolytos⁵ in the field of Hellenism, and by Arnobius, Lactantius, Tertullianus, and St. Augustine in the western world. Their writings are valuable on account of the good and reliable authors they used. But we must take care not to be misled by their custom to transfer such information to their own ages, nor, on the other hand, to ascribe with them to a high antiquity beliefs fostered by a later and syncretistically infected period.⁶

In comparison with these four main sources all our other

¹ Parthey, *Abhand. d. Berl. Akad.* 1865; Leemans, *Pap. Mus. Aeg. Leyd.* II. 1885; Wessely, *Denkschr. d. Wien. Akad.* 1888; 1893 = Kenyon, *Greek Pap. in the B. M.* 1893; Dieterich, *Jahrb. f. Philol. Suppl.* XVI. Abraxas.

² This is especially true of Dieterich, who, in his excellent "Abraxas," indulges in exaggerating the influence of Orphicism, while he is severely handicapped by an insufficient knowledge of Hebrew and Egyptian. Cp. his entirely unwarranted treatment of the Essenes, 137-147, and of the Apocalypse, 117 ff. Lagarde, on the other hand, despaired too soon of the possibility of disentangling the Ephesia grammata. F. i. Pap. Par. (Wessely, 1888) 196, is merely an anagram of the Hebrew words: תְּרָאָה תוֹרָה הַנִּשְׁמָה; and ibid. 1291, ὁ θηηνωρηλις ὁ αὐρ is תֵּן אוֹר, Sun, the giver of light.

³ *Contra Celsum.*

⁴ Στρωματεῖς; esp. VII. 712 A — 714 C Sylb.

⁵ Hippolytos (Ps.-Origenes) κατὰ πασῶν ἀλρέσεων IV.

⁶ A good example is offered by Clem. Al. His statements, at the place quoted, are apparently all taken from some cynical treatise. On the other hand, he draws on his often-used catalogue of εὐρεταί and ascribes the εὐρημα δεισιδαιμονίας to Dardanos, Eetion, Midas, and so on (προστροπτικός 10 B Sylb).

information is insignificant in extent, if we except the Greek novels and the writings of Lucian and Alkiphron in Greece, of Petronius and the satirists in Rome. All these are comparatively late and their value is much impaired by their second-hand character.¹ To a certain degree, we may ourselves explore the storehouse of their knowledge. For they are chiefly indebted to the Athenian comedy of the fifth and the following centuries. Titles like *Δεισιδαίμων* and *Φαρμακοπῶλοι* show how much superstition incited the wit of the comedy-writers, with whom we may class here Epicharmos, closely followed, as we know, by Theokritos. But in quantity the yield of a research in this field is scanty; although, of course, this evidence is invaluable in ascertaining the higher age of late superstitions. The further we go back, the thinner our information grows. Tragic literature and the Lyrics cannot be expected to be rich. It is Hesiod who forms an exception, concerned as he is with rural and everyday life. He justifies our implicit confidence in the conservatism of agricultural traditions; the more so if we compare his poems with the Homeric epos. The Ionian court life, for which this epos was conceived and to which it had to appeal, exercised a destructive influence on the conservation of the homely beliefs of the tiller of the soil in Homer.²

¹ This is especially true of Alkiphron and the Roman satirists. But it holds good of Lucian as well. It was not only in style that he indulged in an imitation of the Athenian comedy (cp. Kock, *Rhein. Mus.* XLIII. 26 ff.), and even of Petronius (notwithstanding A. Collignon's restrictions in his *Étude sur Pétrone*, 312 ff.).

² Traces of superstitious beliefs in this period undoubtedly exist, but they are scarcer than is usually conceded. To my mind, neither the speaking horse, nor Circe with her rod, nor the herb *μῶλυ*, nor, finally, Odysseus' descent into Hades, can be classed with superstitions or even with magics. Xanthos and Balios are of godly descent, and the other alleged instances belong to the sphere of fairy tales which, it is true, may be closely connected with a lost mythology, but must not be dubbed superstitions. Who would call the "Sleeping Beauty" an evidence of superstitious beliefs? The only distinctly superstitious feature is the cure of wounds by charm-songs. But even this need not be called superstition in our sense, as it seems then to have been a living popular belief. These *ἐπαοιδαί* seem still to be on the same scale with prayer, which in its origin was itself a charm-song, and has preserved this character not only in Homeric poetry, but as late as Aeschylus (as I shall show elsewhere). This testifies to the existence of a

So much for literature. At the first glance the monumental evidence might seem likely to become our chief mine of information, richer on account of its daily increase, more valuable on account of the directness of its testimony. But at the present stage of archaeology, I must forbear to make use of the evidence derived from the monuments. For we want close observation and accurate recording of facts, two things which only lately have been recognized as necessary. We possess, indeed, a series of such records in the Italian "Notizie degli Scavi,"¹ but Greek archaeology has scarcely begun to realize their importance.² As for the treasures of our museums, their state is much too motley. Here again the Roman "Museo Papa Giulio," containing the finds of Falerii, sets the example by strictly keeping together the contents of each tomb, regardless of their material. Elsewhere, one has patiently to work through the museum journals, very often without the expected result, especially when the object in question has come from a dealer, or if it is artistically insignificant, as amulets (which chiefly interest us) are for the most part. I think, however, that, even under altered circumstances, literature will still retain its prominence. For symbols cannot be explained without explicit testimony. It is impossible, for instance, to tell from finds, whether the axe is meant as a useful implement in the life beyond, or as an amulet to protect the soul against evil spirits on its way to Hades, or, lastly, if it was worn as an amulet by the possessor in his lifetime.

Inscriptions, of course, are more explicit. Yet it is in the very nature of superstition to conceal itself from the daylight

stratum of crude, primitive beliefs in the Homeric age, which at a later time became obsolete superstitions, but form in this period the really popular religion, as the fetishism of the savage does to-day.

¹ The educational value of such reports is splendidly brought home in Orsi's invaluable papers on his Sicilian excavations: *Bull. paletnol. Ital.*, 1891, 53 ff. *Mon. Antichi* I. and in Halbherr's excavations at the cave of Zeus in Crete, *ibid.*

² Accurate reports on Greek cemeteries and their contents date, to my knowledge, from 1890 only: *Athen. Mitt.* 1890: ὁ ἐν Βουρβῆ τῦμβος. The first trustworthy report on Athenian tombs, which covers any length of time, is that of Brueckner and Pernice, *Athen. Mitt.* 1893: "Ein Athenischer Friedhof."

as far as possible. It cannot surprise us, therefore, to find that this part of antiquity has yielded only very unsatisfactory results.¹

There remains, finally, the modern Greek and Italian Folk Lore, which of late has assumed so important a part. But I think it helps our purposes very little. While it is invaluable as the preserver of ancient *religion*, it is very barren as to ancient *superstition*. It is true, we find often enough surprising survivals. But in every case we must ask if this is not due to learned tradition, a very important, yet too often ignored, factor in medieval and modern superstitions. I must here utter my decided protest against the exaggerations to which Folk Lore is driven in our days.² We must not ascribe to a remote age a particular superstition simply because there are others that really reach so far back. Analogies, at the best, prove only probability, and we should refrain from using modern beliefs, except where their historical connection with antiquity can be plainly demonstrated.³

III.

We must now say a word about the method of our work.

The first thing is to collect the material. This must comprise the whole range of ancient literature, always carefully weighing the nature of the evidence, so as to reject mere autoschediasms.⁴ We must not, however, be too scrupulous. For a given superstition might originate with a foreign people, be carried into Greece by trade, and here, blending with analogous ideas, finally become the recognized property

¹ This remark intentionally ignores the "*devotiones*." These do not fall under the view of inscriptions taken above. Neither are they of considerable value for the history and the development of superstition. Their chief importance is in the light they throw on syncretism. See the abstract, in this volume, of a paper by Professor Battle, on *devotiones* on leaden tablets.

² See e.g. H. Gaidoz' remarks on the *ἐρινὸς καμψίπους*, Mélusine, VI. 172; VII. 39 ff.

³ As is the case with the superstitions connected with Charos, above, p. 43.

⁴ For example, the inventions of Ptolemaeos Chennos or of Fulgentius.

of Greek Lore.¹ After this, the monumental evidence must be gathered, especially from vase and mural paintings and from amulets. Very little has as yet been done in this direction. The best way seems to be that begun in the *Folk Lore Journal*,² viz. to compile indexes to the different authors. This could be accomplished with comparative ease by dividing the work among different scholars.

This *thesaurus superstitionum* should then be sifted. We shall have to compare all the testimonies bearing on the same subject, in order to reject the secondary evidence. This, however, is not a mechanical task, but requires a careful examination of the respective writers' character; for a fact may be borrowed from an earlier author and still be valid for the compiler's own period.³ After this, we once more sift our material with regard to its origin. We must try to sever it from foreign importations, assign to these their different nationalities, and, if possible, state when and by whom they have been added. One impediment here is the surprising analogy of superstitions throughout the world.⁴ From the outset, we may naturally exclude all beliefs connected with exotic animals, plants, and stones. We shall further reject foreign gods and demons. But even these rules have their exceptions.⁵ For there is, especially among the writers of Utopias, a tendency to transfer Greek beliefs to foreign nations,⁶ which seems to rest upon a natural impulse. In the history of the evil eye, for example, we are able to show that a belief originating among the Greeks was

¹ Cato's praise of the brassica may serve as an illustration. The seven good qualities which he ascribes to it have been taken from Pythagorean doctrine (Woelfflin, *Arch. f. Lex.* IX. 343). To the same source one might refer Horat. *Sat.* II. 6, 63-65. The circumstances, however, which connect this passage with Ovid, *Fasti* VI. 181 ff. (below p. 54 ff.) show that the cabbage has found its way into popular belief, as, indeed, it had probably already in Cato's age.

² *Folk Lore Journ.* I. 115 ff.: "The Folk Lore in Horace," by A. B. Cook.

³ This is the case with many of Lucian's statements; cp. *Philopseudes*, c. 29, with Rohde, *Psyche*, 654, 1; 32, 3.

⁴ Of this Tylor (*Primitive Culture*) and A. Lang (*Myth and Ritual*) have given ample proofs.

⁵ Cp. Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Enc.* 32.

⁶ E. Rohde, *Der griech. Roman*, 194 ff.

ascribed to foreigners, supported by analogous beliefs among these, and thence went on travelling to the ends of the earth with the extension of a more accurate geographical knowledge.¹ Moreover, it is not every superstition, attached to exotic objects, that has its origin in the foreign country itself. For granted a superficial acquaintance with some foreign beliefs, the laws of superstitious reasoning would naturally set to work about the new object. It will certainly be safer to accept even doubtful evidence than to omit things of a possible value.

The superstitions remaining after this double sifting must now be followed back to the time when they first appear. But we cannot permit ourselves to halt here. We must proceed to the labor of interpreting and explaining. Here we shall chiefly make use of Folk Lore. For those cases are exceedingly scarce where we can show the religious origin of a Greek superstition in Greek religion itself.² Generally the key is found in a stage of culture much more primitive than that here preserved. I desire to emphasize, however, my belief that Folk Lore should not be applied in a purely psychological sense.³ We should always prefer Aryan Lore. For the conservatism of ritual and superstition makes it very probable that analogies of related tribes may enable us to find the common racial origin, albeit in a pre-Grecian period.⁴ I am, indeed, fully aware of the dangers which beset this path. But in a work of such an extent, and, as I hope to have sufficiently shown, of no mean importance to the history of religious thinking, it might be worth while to run even the risk of much fruitless searching and some hypothetical conclusions: *dies diem docebit*.

¹ The double pupil, as characteristic of the person possessing the evil eye, must have been an aboriginal Greek belief, found, however, among other nations as well (Tuchmann, *La Fascination*, Mélusine IV. 33). It is afterwards in turn ascribed to the Triballi, the Illyrii, the Bitiae in Scythia, and the Thibii in Pontus (O. Jahn, *über den Aberglauben vom bösen Blick*, Sitzgsber. Leipz. Akad., 1855, 35). Modern analogies prove the origin of this migration to have been as sketched above.

² Some examples are given, *Rhein. Mus.* XLIX. 177 ff.

³ This tendency I consider to be the chief shortcoming of Rohde's *Psyche*.

⁴ See below, example 2.

Finally, after all this has been done, one more duty remains to fulfil the ideal requirements of such a research. After we have shown the religious origin and the gradual deterioration of a number of beliefs, we must try to recognize and to clearly define the laws according to which this development is proceeding; and, inasmuch as to us superstition and religion spring from the same source, to further on our part the research into the origin of religion itself.

IV.

Let us now consider a few examples where superstitions may still be traced back to their probable origin.

In the papyrus XLVI. of the Brit. Mus. 71-96, there is a charm for the detection of a thief. From the wood of the gallows a hammer is manufactured under certain ceremonies. With this the sorcerer beats his ear, while reciting a charm-song. Its end is: *πόσον κρούω τὸ οὐάτιον σφύρη ταύτη, ὃ τοῦ κλέπτου ὀφθαλμὸς κρουέσθω καὶ φλεγμαινέσθω, ἄχρι οὗ αὐτὸν μηνύσῃ*. A similar procedure was practised during the seventeenth century in Holstein.¹ This might be ascribed to learned tradition. But another testimony leads us far away from magic. A vase from southern Italy, approximately of the sixth century,² bears the following inscription: *Ταταίης εἰμὶ λήκυθος ὃς δ' ἄν με κλέψῃ, θυφλὸς ἔσται*. Here, for once, the idea which underlies the charm is clearly expressed and, moreover, raised from the sphere of superstition. For it is only the belief in the power of the curse which protects the vessel from being stolen. Separated by more than six centuries we see the same idea still prevailing, although considerably altered and added to. Nor can there be any doubt as to its root. It is closely connected with the evil eye. For theft is only the actual acquiring of an envied property. In the same way in our days the milk of the "overlooked" cow is drawn into the pail of the witch. The same thought is expressed on the mosaic of the Villa Casali,³ where we see

¹ G. Freytag, *Bilder a. d. deutschen Vergangenheit*, IV. 50 ff.

² C. I. G. I. 865.

³ *Eranos Vindobonensis*, 285 ff. (Bienkowski).

the evil eye pierced and blinded by a spear-thrust, and in the inscription *C. I. L. VIII. 11863: hoc vide, vide et vide, ut possis plura videre.*¹

Pliny says² that, if a woman with child passed over a viper or an amphisbaena she was sure to miscarry. The same happened if she ate a raven's egg or passed over it.³ The reason for this lies in the connection of these animals with the nether world. The snake, we know, is one of the many shapes of the dead. Whoever comes in contact with the dead will die himself. It cannot surprise us, to find the same belief in India. "In the Mahabhâratâ, the girl Pramadvarâ falls to the ground dead, having inadvertently pressed a serpent with her foot on the way."⁴

The possible escape of the mother in the Greek belief is only a partial mitigation of the original form. As for the raven, in the absence of express statements,⁵ it must suffice to remember that Aristeas' soul left his body under this disguise.⁶ But we may perhaps go still farther. The snake is not only the soul, but probably death itself. At least, if I am right in connecting Pliny's information with Aelian's. Pliny tells us⁷: the stick that was used to rescue a frog from the mouth of a snake is of particular virtue in facilitating delivery in childbirth, while we learn from Aelian⁸ that the bite of the asp is most difficult to cure after it has devoured a frog. That the frog itself was a shape of the soul can be inferred from the German fairy tale of the prince frog⁹ and, maybe, also from its being used as an amulet against the evil eye.¹⁰ It can be easily understood that death doubles its power after once having exercised it, and it is, on the other hand, very natural that the stick which deprived death of its prey should itself acquire a life-giving power.

¹ Ibid. 292, 2.

³ Plin. *N. H.* X. 32; XXX. 130.

⁵ Bienkowski, *Eran. Vind.* 292.

⁷ Plin. *N. H.* XXX. 129.

⁹ Grimm's *Maerchen: der treue Heinrich*.

¹⁰ Elworthy, *The Evil Eye*, 309 ff.

² Plin. *N. H.* XXIX. 71.

⁴ Gubernatis, *Zool. Mythol.* II. 401.

⁶ Plin. *N. H.* VII. 174.

⁸ Aelian, *N. A.* IX. 15.

In his *Fasti*¹ Ovid tells us that it was customary to eat pork, beans, and grits on the first of June, to guard against diseases of the bowels: *ne laedantur viscera*. This ridiculous remedy assumes another aspect when we turn to German beliefs. During the "twelfths," at Christmas-time, Berchtha roams on the earth with her pageant, inspecting the spinning-wheels and slashing the bellies of her despisers. She cuts them open, fills them with chaff, and patches them, using a ploughshare as needle and an iron chain by way of thread.² She spares only those who have eaten gruel and fish.³ The aim of this food is apparently to grease the skin in order that the knife may slide off. In spite of the surprising resemblance, the difference of the seasons may cause some doubt. Now we must remember that June is the month of the summer solstice, as the twelfths are that of the winter. It is the month of Juno, who in some respects seems to correspond to Berchtha, and who may even be suspected to have some connection with the nether world. We may at least safely assume that on this day she was believed to be present on earth. But how came pork, beans, and grit to be endowed with these protective faculties? For the "grease-theory" seems to be only secondary. Horace⁴ compares the quiet and ease of rural life to the bustle of the city. Verses 63-65, kindly pointed out to me by Professor Usener, praise "the bean of Pythagoras together with cabbage and fat pork": *O noctes cenaque deum*, he exclaims. So pork, beans, and cabbage are the food of the gods themselves. The cabbage was highly praised by Cato,⁵ and seems to have been a sacred plant in Greece also.⁶ The grits are not mentioned, but as they are found in the German belief, and as we think of the importance of *mola salsa*, we may safely see in them, too, the food of the gods. It is easy to see why this food will protect man against the noxious inroad of the gods. By partaking of their food we become gods ourselves: to taste of ambrosia renders immortal. The chthonic character of pork and beans

¹ Ovid, *Fasti*, VI. 181 ff.

² Grimm, *Teuton. Mythol.* I. 276.

³ Wuttke, *Deutscher Volksabergl.*² § 25.

⁴ *Sat.* II. 6.

⁵ See above, note 1, p. 50.

⁶ Lobeck, *Aglaoph.* 903.

may confirm our suspicion of a chthonic element in Juno herself. The Lemures, however, were already appeased in May. But perhaps they were once more at large in Juno's month, whose first half was considered unlucky for marriages, perhaps for the same reason as May.¹ This, however, remains doubtful.

¹ *Mense malas Maio nubere vulgus ait*: Ovid, *Fasti*, V. 489. Cp. Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Enc.* I. 46, 7 ff.